

The Outlook for Lebanon

President Amin Gemayel's efforts to resurrect the Lebanese nation from eight years of civil war and foreign occupation appear doomed to failure. The prognosis is for a prolonged de facto partition of the country into three zones -- an Israeli-occupied south (the "North Bank"), Syrian-occupied east and north, and an unstable region around Beirut divided between several warring Lebanese factions. Israel's withdrawal to the Awwali River in September will effectively formalize this arrangement.

Amin's presidency has failed primarily because of the bitter confessional rivalries that have bedeviled Lebanon since its creation by the French in the 1940s. The Maronite Christians, led by the Phalange Party, are not willing to give up their domination of the country's power centers. The Phalange feels it won the civil war (albeit because of Israel's invasion) and fears that any new power sharing formula that alters the 1943 National Pact will ultimately lead to a Muslim takeover. In particular, Amin's 78-year old father, Pierre Gemayel, is fully determined to resist any change in Lebanon's political structure. As the creator of the Phalange and its dominant figure, Pierre is capable of blocking meaningful movement toward reconciliation. Moreover, Pierre can count on the backing of the tough, young leaders of the Lebanese Forces militia who have long been alienated from Amin and cherish the memory of his hardline brother Bashir.

On the Muslim side the shock of the Israeli intervention has worn off.

[redacted] reporting indicates the Muslim militias, with Syrian aid, 25X1 are rearming even in West Beirut. Druze leader Walid Jumblatt is continuing his father's crusade for a fundamental restructuring of Lebanese politics to

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give the Muslims in general and the Druze in particular more power to reflect the Muslim's majority status. Muslim elder statesmen like Sunni leader Saeb Salam and Shia leader Kamal Assad are again losing their prominence to younger men like Walid and Shia Amal militia leader Nabih Barri -- a trend reminiscent of the early days of the 1975-1976 civil war. Amin, however, continues to refuse to deal meaningfully with Jumblatt and Barri because he knows their vision of a new Lebanon is unacceptable to the Gemayel family and the Phalange.

Even if some temporary agreement is worked out to facilitate a Lebanese Army move into the Shuf to replace the IDF, it is not likely to last. The confessional hatreds -- passed from father to son for generations -- are simply too strong. If Amin tries to use the Army to impose his will on the Shuf, the Druze will retaliate with artillery attacks on Beirut, seek Amal and Syrian support and try to split the Army on confessional grounds. Their chances of at least limited success are fairly good.

Israeli and Syrian Actions

Both Jerusalem and Damascus have come to accept de facto partition as all but inevitable. Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Begin and Defense Minister Arens, believe Amin is too weak to rule effectively and may not survive at all. Israel's strategy now appears to be to ignore the Gemayel government unless it is willing to ratify the 17 May Israeli-Lebanese Agreement and, instead, make a series of ad hoc arrangements with the various Lebanese factions. Aren's 16 August visit to East Beirut was intended to restore IDF-LF ties undermined by the recriminations following the Sabra-Shatilla massacre. [] indicate Israel ironically is also giving^{25X1} arms to Jumblatt's Druze to strengthen their ability to resist LF and PLO moves into the Shuf. Feelers have been sent out to other factions. In the

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south, Israel is strengthening Major Haddad's forces and other local Shia militias. Whether Israel can successfully play all these factions against each other remains to be seen, but Jerusalem seems persuaded that it has no alternative to a prolonged stay in the south.

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[] report the Syrians are pleased with the trend toward partition which President Assad believes will maximize Syrian influence in Lebanon and give Damascus a major role in all Arab-Israeli developments. Syria gains major political benefits, including a stranglehold over the PLO, by staying in northern and eastern Lebanon, areas of traditional Syrian hegemony. Assad can be expected to do all he can to fan the flames of unrest in the Shuf and Beirut to keep Amin weak while avoiding a direct military clash with Israel. Syrian allies like Jumblatt and former President Franjiah will be encouraged to insist the 17 May agreement with Israel be scrapped as a precondition for national reconciliation.

Implications for the US

The MNF presence in Beirut is critical to maintaining whatever semblance of stability the capital enjoys. Should it be withdrawn, Amin's remaining credibility would collapse and civil war erupt again along the Green Line. US prestige in the region would suffer.

On the other hand, expansion of the MNF's deployment by patrols into the Shuf risks almost certain higher casualties. Deployed in Beirut and the airport the MNF is away from the major battlefield, at least for now, and the Marines are likely to face primarily occasional artillery fire and sporadic terrorism if they stay put. In the Shuf, the MNF will be exposed to all the dangers the IDF has faced as every extremist in the Middle East seeks to damage US prestige by attacking the Marines.

De facto partition will be messy. The risk of an Israeli-Syrian war in the Bekaa Valley will remain ever present and would increase if civil war

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breaks out in Beirut. For the foreseeable future, however, partition is here to stay because it meets the interests of Israel and Syria and is consistent with the realities of Lebanese politics.

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